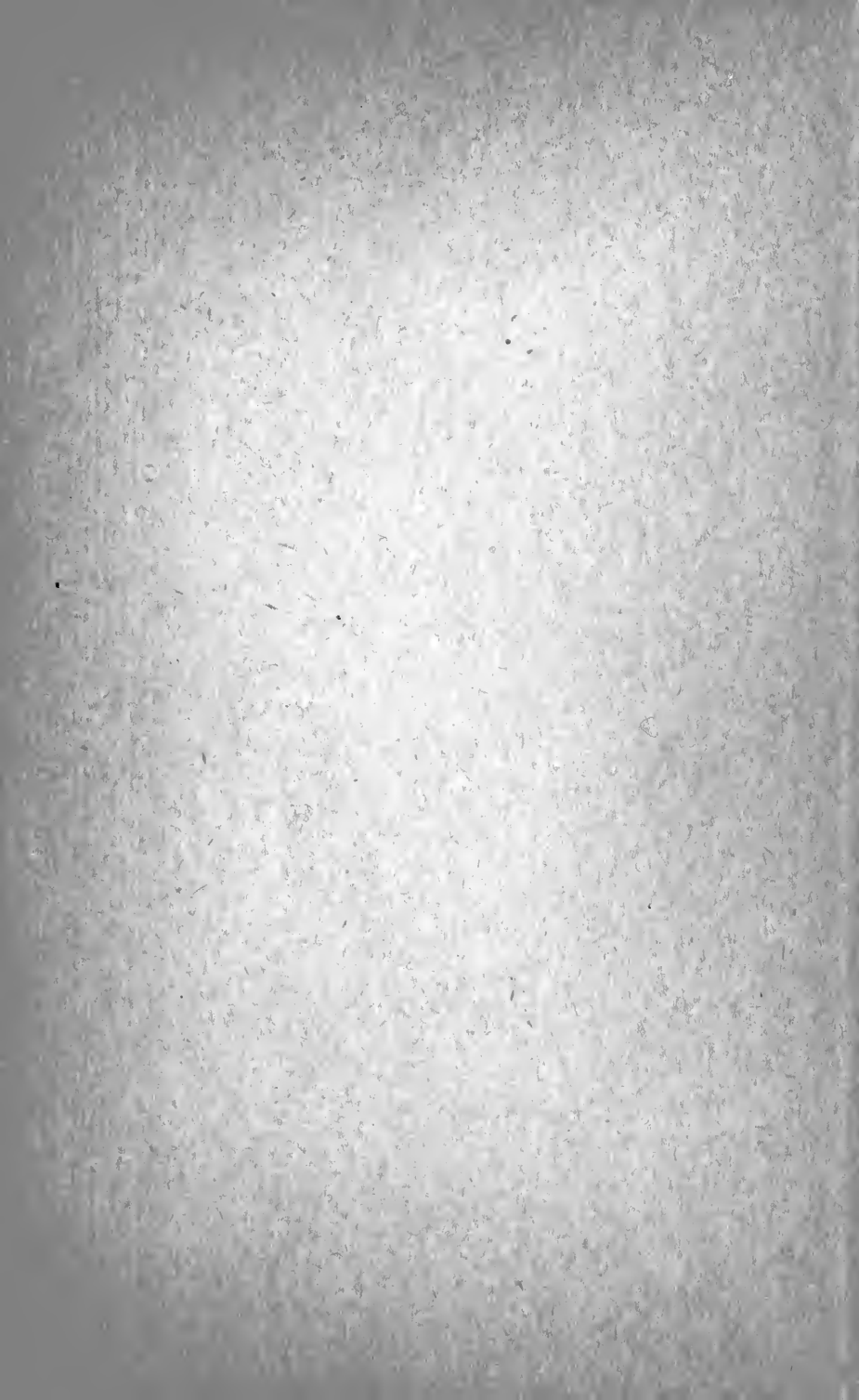


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OTHELLO

An Interpretation

By

MABELLE PHILIPS WEBB

Author of "Questions on Othello
for Clubs."



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"C. C."
To You,
OF
CENTRAL
AND OF
COTTEY COLLEGE



FOREWORD



THIS little work is written for the good reader, because the good reader makes the good book. In writing I had in view not only the discussion of those difficulties and differences of opinion that must be faced by the club studying this drama, but also the hope of interesting some who might not otherwise become interested in this the last of the four great tragedies with which individual students and clubs become acquainted.

"Shakespeare Again," Lowell was not afraid to christen his little book. And why? Because though old, he knew that a study in Shakespeare is always new and always different. Each

written life bears more or less the stamp of the personality which produces it; every new viewpoint gives a new facet. How many Hamlets have been written, and yet no two are alike! And because there remain undiscovered regions of thought, there is room for other Hamlets and Othellos which may fulfill our conception more perfectly than any heretofore written. This is my Othello. May I hope that the same will find favor with my reader?

M. P. WEBB.

WARRENSBURG, MO.

Othello: An Interpretation

AMONG readers of books and people of thought studies in Shakespeare, introduced with worshipful remarks about the poet, are honored in proportion to their absence. They take it most unkindly having mere platitudes forced upon their notice, and cry out against such offenses, as did Montaigne when he declared, "I do not need to be told what death and pleasure are!" Generally, though, they have never come to terms about which is greatest of Shakespeare's plays, and for this reason the question never loses its interest. "England has but two books," said Victor Hugo; "one of these is Shakespeare." It is no marvel, then, that such a ques-

tion should command, and receive, some attention. At one time or another it is discussed by the old and the young, by those commencing a study of the poet and those leaving off, without any exact hope of coming to an agreement. It is universally conceded, however, that the dramas include four tragedies of the first rank of genius: "Hamlet," the tragedy of thought-concentration without expression; "Macbeth," the tragedy of hunger and ambition; "Lear," the tragedy of greed; and "Othello," the tragedy of intellect. When it comes to deciding which of these is superior, differences of opinion again prevail. Every thoughtful student has a preference, and one may not hope with any choice to satisfy more than the likeminded. Ulrici says that Englishmen consider "O t h e l l o" Shakespeare's unrivaled drama. By way of corroborating this, it might almost seem, Macaulay wrote,

“‘Othello’ is, perhaps, the greatest work in the world;” and Wordsworth reckons it with two others as the most pathetic of human compositions. Carlyle characteristically speaks of “Time-defying Othellos.”

Goethe said that the rude man requires only to see something going on; the man of more refinement must be made to feel; while the truly cultured man requires also to be made to think. One may get nothing but the moving picture from “Othello;” and he gets much, but only to get this is to suffer the eye to become a monopolist, to play the cheat. Though one hidden brush is the painter, the drama provides for all three classes in abundance. As it moves swiftly across the field of vision, swept onward by the winds of passion, it has that within it which awakes every imaginable mood of heart and brain. Here it “is barbarous enough to excite, there

tender enough to assuage." The hurricane of life sweeps through the pages, tossing lives like leaves to and fro, as the cold, cutting force of intellectuality pits itself against the blind infinitude of love.

Shakespeare exhibits love in its widest range in this drama, including every mental condition, every tone, from the slightest kindliness up to the most earnest covenant; from the first perception of sensible presence up to the fierceness of all-destroying passion. Lessing says that he gives a living picture of all the most minute and secret artifices by which a feeling steals into our soul, of all the imperceptible advantages which it there gains, of all the stratagems by which every other passion is made subservient to it, till it becomes the sole tyrant of our desires and our aversions.

While the essence of this tragedy is action—the soul in action, in its collision

with a stronger force—all feeling, all thought goes out to the victim. In its tragical working out of human destiny, “never was more intensity put into book before; never, perhaps, will more burn on any later page.” The fact that Iago is one of the two most intellectual of Shakespeare’s creations requires thought for comprehension merely. The ambition of Faust, universal desire, enters to a great extent into Iago. He adds another chapter to the race in which it records its horror of its prison. All of the dramas written during this period of Shakespeare’s life comprise dark tragedies, black contradictions of life. The keynote of them is: What do we know? what ultimate knowledge do we possess? There he leaves the question. As much as to say that the mysteries of life are more satisfying for our human needs than man’s answers to those mys-

teries. The muse of comedy kissed the poet only on the lips, but the muse of tragedy on the heart.

In reference to the moral scope of the view of life which "Othello" presents, Sydney Lanier places it in what he designates as the "Real Period." For this reason, he says, it appeals to all nations and times. In another classification of the plays made by Professor Dowden as follows: "In the Workshop;" "In the World;" "Out of the Depths;" "On the Heights,"—this falls into that period known as "Out of the Depths."

When it is understood that this remarkable work represents the genius of Shakespeare at its height—for at this time his powers rode the zenith—it will readily be comprehended that whosoever undertakes to write of its beauties, its meaning, and the differences of opinion in regard to it, essays no easy task.

Hamilton Wright Mabie says that no one ever gets to the bottom of Shakespeare's thought. We shall only attempt to interpret here a line, there a line. Personally, however, we do not care for those departments of human inquiry that have no depths, no difficulties. There may be places where we can find neither latitude nor longitude, much less show others the way; but be that as it may, with Carlyle we count it more profitable to have to do with men of depth than men of shallowness. If we have an occasional fall, however, those who read may profit by our missteps, and will not refuse their indulgence.

"Othello" is a contest between man and circumstances, in which circumstances are victorious. The resolution is in sorrow and death without reconciliation, and purposely it bears the name of a single individual. Tragedy as conceived by Shakespeare is concerned

not with the outer, but the inner life; the ruin and restoration of the soul, its stress and recovery. Success here means neither practical achievement in the world nor material prosperity, but the perfected life of the soul; and failure its ruin, through "passion or weakness, calamity or crime."

No more surely, in the "Ancient Mariner," was the course of the phantom ship, sailing the phantom sea, determined by the phantom man, who held the tiller, than that Iago, by the pulse of his will, causes every action in this play to go forward to its tragic consummation. The opening scene reveals the motive intrigues embodied in Iago; an atmosphere of adventure; the Turkish war enveloping all. We can not fail to notice with what art the dramatist prepares beforehand for the catastrophe by presenting the germ of all the after events. A shadow chases the reader

account,—the material universe and man. His vision fails; he retreats baffled from God. Blindness is only a relative term, however, for the vision of each of us gives out at a certain point. With Shakespeare nature was furthermore always subsidiary to the chief personages; man was, therefore, pre-eminently his theme. For a background in "Othello" he gives Venice, war, adventure; out of that should steal the main picture. First you look for the central figure; without doubt that is Iago. It is no difficult matter to put the other characters into place. In the contrast of the character of Iago with that of Othello lies the central point of the spiritual import. Far as the poles apart are Othello, the great heart, and Iago, the proud intellect. The latter, however, is the central figure, the dramatic hero, and the motive personage.

Other writers aimed their satire at

individuals; Shakespeare at one stroke in Iago lashed thousands. Men idolize intellect. It has become the Moloch to which life itself is sacrificed. Brightness is rated above goodness, and intellectuality above fidelity. Mind is held supreme over spirit; brains are on the throne. Every man who has attained to any of the higher degrees of intellect has at times but to place his finger on his pulse to feel throbbing there the blood of Iago; for Iago believed in the adequacy of intellect alone and unsupported, so only that intellect was great enough. This creation, therefore, in his inability to value moral beauty and worth, and in his immoderate prizing of brain, exalting it above everything else in the world, is to-day one of the most universally true in literature and life. This fact gives to the drama the stamp of modernness, makes it like the twentieth century itself. So instead of a picture of a

dead past, we have a leaf torn from the living present.

Shakespeare, the seer, understanding fully the power of intellect, has here, working with intensest impulse, flung forth a masterpiece; and to his work of art he has given the name "Othello," "for he was great of heart."

In science the intention of a thing is the purpose it really serves, which is discoverable by analysis. [So the purpose of this tragedy, when analyzed, is to show that the heart is the only source of power which masters men for good; that the history of each life worth record is the history of its loves; that a full head does not compensate for a foul heart; but that the heart should beat in the brain.

The poet in his youth found great pleasure in the sparkle of intellect, the play of thought. After he had seen more of the deep sorrow of the world,

and its deeper evil, he came to realize that intellect is tributary, not sovereign; and not only that morals and mind should be in everlasting bond, but that the superior of these should be kept supreme. He realized also that "out of the heart are the issues of life," instead of out of the will or understanding.

Carlyle does not believe that a man able to originate deep thoughts is unable to see them when originated; Lowell, with what courage we know not, said that Shakespeare was no inspired idiot. Intentionally or not, however, he teaches through Iago that to lift intellect alone is to put whitewash on the rascal, to furnish forth the villain. It must be conceded that the ethical and intellectual have always been correlated in history, whether the question is studied in the follower of Brahma or Confucius; in Greek or Jew; in Buddhist monastery or medieval monasticism. Each nation's

history reveals their inseparability, and that morality is the basis of all sound intellectual culture, and its only safe conservator. A sympathetic study of the poet in this work reveals the essential moral nature of his teaching in regard to truth, intellect, life, and love. His message is a message for every century.

Emerson said, "Intellect and morals meet in the man if he is to be great." In Iago we see the tragedy of an intellect which has cast off all moral allegiance. In Richard III, in Falstaff, and in Iago, pride of intellect without moral feeling is the ruling impulse. In the most desperate, in the most dissolute, and in the most consummate of Shakespeare's villains is found the same distinguishing characteristic—a supreme prizing of intellect.

Out of Iago's own mouth in the first scene we get the key by which we unlock the motive of the play. Sodden with

suspicion, he conceives, and then proceeds to nurse, what he himself half-way believes to be a baseless idea that Othello had wronged him with his wife, Emilia. Whether true or false, he resolves in the following words to make Othello know every pang of jealousy:

“I have it; it is engendered: Hell and Night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the
world's light.”

Man sees what he has trained himself to see, what he is interested in seeing. And what is lived in the thought-world sooner or later becomes objectified in the life. Nursed in the lowest ranks, intrigue has shaped his intellect till he had become so subtle to suspect that suspicion goes beyond all bounds, and makes himself its victim. Too long he breathed this air of hell—he was at last consumed by its flames; and this is the

motive of the tragedy, Iago's suspicious, consuming jealousy.

He feared neither to soil his fingers nor sicken his heart in any black labyrinth of wickedness. His aims were never of a simple sort, or easy of attainment; but to the utmost degree he was expert in pursuing them. He spared no pains in making each evil produce a maximum of results; for he looked upon iniquity as altogether too precious to be thrown away. He compassed this by a concentration, a drawing of all the intrigues into unity. By such economy of villainy he brings it about that all done toward racking Othello's heart with misery is so much done toward the ruin of Cassio. ¶ In plotting against Desdemona he wishes to remove Cassio and be even'd with Othello. ¶ He seeks to be rid of Cassio for two reasons; first, he wants his office; then the beauty of his life makes him so ugly, the sun's rays reveal

the dust! Brutus is never so honorable as when Cæsar is not by! Mere intellect brought into the presence of character casts a shadow. [Where Cassio passed, there went a silent judgment upon corruption. A standard of character seemed unconsciously to accompany him, commanding and compelling discrimination between the base and noble. Iago's peculiar villainies found in Cassio their peculiar antagonist.]

In regard to woman—and Iago was ever what he willed to be—he holds the maxims of the Turk. Coleridge cries out in repugnance: ["Cassio is an enthusiastic admirer, almost a worshiper, of Desdemona. O that detestable code that excellence can not be loved in any form that is female, but it must needs be selfish! . . . It ought to be impossible that the dullest auditor should not feel Cassio's religious love for Desdemona's purity.] Iago's answers are the sneers

which a proud, bad intellect feels toward a woman and expresses to a wife. Surely it ought to be considered a very excellent compliment to woman that all the sarcasms on them in Shakespeare are put in the mouths of villains."

[Cassio's morals do not altogether tally with our ideas of virtue. But his morals were ahead of his time, and his regard for Desdemona was all that Coleridge—Shakespeare's truest critic—teaches. In respect to virtue in itself, the world was ages behind what it is to-day. For the story of virtue, like the history of the race, the life of the individual, is a growth, a progress, a Bible. To intelligently comprehend any past age, whether barbarous or enlightened, the pendulum of life must be drawn back across the dividing centuries.

In knowledge of character, in expression of passion and tone-play, the third act in this drama is hardly paralleled in

✓ literature. Here is found the famous "Suggestion Scene," where Iago goes nigher the wind than any other villain, and, without really affirming anything, drives his victim with suspense and suffering to insensibility.

Iago had roamed the earth from Smyrna to England; his course diversified with many vicissitudes; his life spent on the open theater of the world. In reading character he had become an adept; he could spy out with perfect acuteness where another's weak side lay. In the cold north-light of his intellect he seems to have exactly calculated Othello's vulnerable spot; while Othello lacked nothing less than everything in his ability to see through Iago. Though Othello had been hardened by twenty years of wars and shipwrecks, at Iago's words he swoons for grief. Iago knew just how to manufacture more than the plausible, whitewash the false; or, as a

Dumas might say, he made the false truer than truth. From this on, the plot thickens; his medicine works. He understood but too well that every man is led and misled in a way that is personal and individual to himself. With the perfection of skill he keeps Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo, on the road to ruin; so that, partakers or not of his crime, they must share his punishment. His head is as acute as his heart is callous. He finds especial joy in probing Othello to the quick. "He hates him as a man," says Froude, "because his nature is the perpetual opposite and perpetual reproach of his own." He takes pleasure in the worst side of everything, and in proving himself an overmatch for circumstances. He shrinks from nothing which will serve his turn. His villainies were combined in far other order in his own mind, we must say in fairness, than we have

painted them; under colors which did not, indeed, paint them up, but exhibited them as virtues. References to his own integrity he takes as an affront to be resented. Will and intellect were the only faculties recognized in his world. No other creature ever showed a hungrier avidity of evil than seemed to sting him; his end in life was evil, and nothing but evil. He drained dry the cup of iniquity, yet remained unsated.

Mr. Green's notes concerning him say: "Crime is pleasant to him. I will not assert that such a man can not exist; but I know that he is improbable." Shakespeare did not altogether invent Iago; he summoned him from out the world, and has given us a career which is a type. Take villains individually, and no one of them ever was an Iago; sum up villainy, and you have him. It is a type which lives; but in which there is nothing that cries out "Beware!" to

warn you, as in the less perfect villain. It is not without its significance that Shakespeare makes him only twenty-eight years old. He was a villain born, not the result of sad experience. He has no heart to love; no bowels to suffer; no eyes to weep,—nothing of man except the form. To such a being neither the intensity of joy of which the soul is capable, nor the cross and passion of a human heart could be understood; his only human quality was a subtle, penetrating intellect. The great moralist would have us know there is something worse in life than suffering,—an incapacity to feel. Those alone capable of great suffering are capable of loving greatly. For this reason the resolution in sorrow and suffering is ethical and spiritual.

If we put together in the play all that Iago had to say of himself, and all that others say and appear to feel about him,

we get a truer idea of him than any other way. That will be the correct reading of his character, as far as we shall ever read it; account for, and in some way reconcile, what is represented.

[We know from what he himself says and does that he is the most insufferable creature in soul that ever trod the stage—a very flame of hell; that no white-washing of his name is possible; it is a blot on the human race.] We learn from the text that in personal appearance and in reputation he was the exact opposite of all this.

Shakespeare seems to take pains to show us for a purpose that even his wife had no idea of anything but his honesty and warmth of heart. Though she had even aided him in his great villainies, she was ignorant of them. Emilia was not a woman to be easily imposed upon, and yet she was imposed upon, and had

confidence in his goodness of heart from the first to very near the last. Early in the tragedy, speaking of Cassio's disgrace, she says she knows it grieves her husband as if the case were his; then at the end we witness her utter astonishment when she learns that Iago is the villain who spoiled Desdemona's life and caused her death.

He is easily the most popular young man in Venice; this we know from the way his friends, "great ones," interest themselves in getting him an office. He wins every one to trust him, the good as well as the bad, that he may profit by their confidence. He lays himself out to make friends, and accomplishes his purpose any way at all so that it is effected. To one he is imperious, to another obsequious; he bends to occasion; blows hot and blows cold; prefers cunning to force; is quick of scent and sharp of

tooth; everything and nothing by turns; at one and the same time human and un-human. [He has no good principles, absolutely none.] Since in such vast ability he was hindered by nothing in the way of scruples, there was no end to the evil he could do, except the end of him. All he needed was life; his powers were boundless—limited only by that. He is, necessarily, therefore, Shakespeare's most consummate villain—the most perfect which has marked the world's history.

“One first question,” said a philosopher, “I ask of every man: Has he an aim which, with undivided soul, he follows and advances towards? Whether his aim be a right one or a wrong one forms but my second question.” Iago marked out a path for himself to travel, and traveled the same like a will incarnated. Though he be a villain of the first water, it should not hinder us

from running to see how he managed it, and what befell in the end. Such lives are insignificant, and deserve study. It is man's merit to rule external circumstances, and as little as possible be ruled by them. Without us are the elements, —within us force. Whosoever strives in our sight with all his powers to reach an object, whether it is one that we praise or blame, may count on exciting our interest. In such cases usually, as Dr. Johnson says, there is danger "lest wickedness conjoined with abilities should steal upon esteem, though it misses approbation; but the character of Iago is so conducted that he is, from the first scene to the last, hated and despised." In word, act, and thought he did nothing but lie. When the play opens he has reached sure perfection in the art; there is nothing like it. He is the king of liars. Yet he is labeled no less than about twoscore times with

“honest” and “good” by his future victims. After the murder of Desdemona, Emilia exclaims:

“My husband say that she was false!”

Othello repeats his words:

“He, woman;

I say thy husband: dost understand the word?
My friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago.”

In the old story from which Othello is taken, it is through the tenderness Desdemona feels for the child of Iago, whom her father teaches to steal the handkerchief, that he takes occasion to destroy her. For a child to have stolen the pledge of love under such circumstances, and with such results, Shakespeare seems to have felt, would have been to have heaped the measure, to have exaggerated horror, to have sinned against art as well as nature. “Mon-

sters should not propagate," said an Englishman; "a child of Iago is not to be endured by man."

When Desdemona in deep distress sends for Iago and asks:

"Alas, Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him."

He goes to him. Not, however, to reconcile, but to trade upon her confiding trustfulness by rousing a fiend of wrath in Othello. It stands written upon his front, as it is said to have been upon Mephistopheles, that he never loved a living soul.

From the time when Iago kneels with the Moor and includes himself in the oath of vengeance, all has gone forward as he wished. His sin, like a fire, has completely encircled the innocent,—Shakespeare knew that crime was not simple in its consequences. Fate hides

till he thinks he has made an end of those he hates; then Nemesis plays with Iago. The turning point of the drama begins in the second scene of the last act, one hundred and fortieth line. There the tragic consummation gives way to reaction. The intrigues one by one react upon the head of the intriguer, while blood flows like water; for such sin will not be satisfied with a single victim. He has tortured Othello into slaying Desdemona, and he in turn is goaded into taking Emilia's life; and thus his words come true, he is "even'd with Othello wife for wife." He made a tool and fool of Roderigo, then cast him aside; but the contents of Roderigo's pocket furnish the evidence against him. He plotted to take the office and life of Cassio, but Cassio lives to demand his for the sake of justice.

Every man will make for himself the most wicked man that he, by the power

of his will and imagination, can create; but the secret of the abyss of Iago lies deeper than ever plummet sounded save Shakespeare's. Compare this incarnation with Goethe's Mephistopheles, the majestic spirit of Milton's invention; or, compare him with Shakespeare's other villains; and one and all are spirits of less deep damnation than that incarnated in "Othello." He might be said to be the great dramatist's idea of the wonderful power that lies between a man's two temples, and, also, the wonderful potential evil when power rests in the mind alone.

Father Vaughan, the lecturer, says "Iago is the great mystery. Can a soul be absolutely given over to evil?" But no matter how incomprehensible the characters of Hamlet and Iago may be—and in this respect they are true to nature, for there is much in every life to elude and baffle inquiry—they possess

a tantalizing charm for the thoughtful man, and, though they balk him, he will continue to work upon them as upon all insoluble problems. They do not answer, however, because life does not answer. There is a kind of fitness; after all our inquiries it seems right that what has so much power to offend as this unparalleled Iago should be left in semi-darkness, unresolved. It is little we know except that he warred against the whole world, owning no man for friend.

In turning to Othello, the passive hero of the play, we can not do better than introduce him with a few lines by an anonymous critic:

“ ‘Othello’ is no love story; all that is below tragedy in the passion of love is taken away at once by the awful character of Othello; for such he seems to us designed to be. He appears never as a lover. . . . His love itself, as long as it is happy, is perfectly calm and serene,

—the protecting tenderness of a husband. It is not till it is disordered that it appears as a passion: then is shown a power in contention with itself,—a mighty being struck with death, and bringing up from all the depths of life convulsions and agonies. It is no exhibition of the power of the passion of love, but of the passion of life, vitally wounded and self-overmastering. . . .

His happy love was heroic tenderness; his injured love is terrible passion; and disordered power engendered within itself to its own destruction, is the height of all tragedy.

“The character of Othello is perhaps the most greatly drawn, the most heroic of any of Shakespeare’s actors; but it is, perhaps, that one also of which his readers last acquire the intelligence.

The intellectual and warlike energy of his mind; his tenderness of affection, his loftiness of spirit; his frank, generous

magnanimity; impetuosity like a thunderbolt; and that dark, fierce flood of boiling passion, polluting even his imagination,—compose a character entirely original, most difficult to delineate, but perfectly delineated.”

We now come to the main action of the play, the story of the love of Othello and Desdemona. This, in large measure, is an assertion of the superiority of that which is seemingly a lesser part of life; namely, emotion. It passes by the achievements of the chief personages to assert, apparently, that the important thing is neither the great action, nor the great intellect, but that love is the great thing in living. In the immolation of intellect at this shrine of the heart Shakespeare gave his verdict,—gave goodness precedence of everything else; elected it as the clue to which man must cling in this labyrinthine life.

R. The Moor was an esteemed and

trusted soldier whom the City of the Sea had engaged in her service. For twenty long years his life had been one of hair-breadth accidents by land and sea. In that far-off time, though a favorite in all tenses, even a greater fascination clung round the wanderer than does to-day. Brabantio, the senator, repeatedly invited Othello to his home, that he might hear again and again the thrilling narrative of one who not only feared no danger, but courted life's vicissitudes. And Desdemona, though unnoticed by her father, was likewise an intensely interested listener. She prayed Othello privately that he would "all his pilgrimage dilate," so that she might the better understand; for to her untraveled thought the world outside of Venice was but a dim conception. Othello, generous to a fault, was more than willing to teach one so very anxious to learn, for her sympathetic interest in his narrative

had not been unobserved. His heart was wholly unoccupied, and for a time it remained untouched. In the daily recital of his wanderings, which in many places were pitiful to tears, it was unknown to him that he was thereby winning the compassionate heart of his receptive pupil. He learned of her secret love by her telling him that if he had a friend, and would but teach him to tell his story, that would woo her. His sterner, warlike qualities were at once tempered by a feeling he had never known before, and, taking the hint, he says, he spake.

Desdemona, being motherless, and for that reason needing a father's friendly counsel, had grown to womanhood ignorant of her father's love,—a love so great and sincere that her loss robbed him of his life,—through that timidity born of fear she failed to take him into her confidence; and was guilty

of that deception towards him which is the peculiar temptation of the timid, loving nature. Never knowing, therefore, the companion a daughter may find in a father, she had lived comparatively alone in the palace, where only old echoes lingered, only old friends came, undrowned by any new voice till Othello's was heard. Then, as day followed day, they became more and more attached to each other, so that she wished always to hear, and he to repeat to one listener only. The reciprocation was most sweet and helpful. But from the days of Abelard and Heloise not only the most violent love, but as much unhappiness as happiness, has arisen from such an intercourse of two beings.

The contrast between the outward and inward man,—the one battle-scarred, unprepossessing, the other loving and lovable,—has rarely been more impressively disclosed than in this story.

The personal anguish following the giving of this fatal love to Desdemona lends that spell to Othello which somewhere finds an echo in almost every experience, and to which no human heart can be wholly indifferent; for few indeed have reached maturity and wholly escaped some visitation of love-sorrow. The very completeness of the shipwreck of his happiness only adds to our interest.

Desdemona's youthfulness made her impatient for complete self-surrender, impatient that a newer authority might supersede the old. Her love for Othello was not merely a girl's fancy. He was a warrior, without those graces women are wont to admire. His manner was grave, reserved. There was a side of his nature which made Desdemona tremble; and yet they were attracted by the wonders of this very unlikeness, for contrasts "like in unlike" are wont to

love each other. A natural affinity of soul seemed to draw together the swarthy Moor and the fair girl of Venice. For this reason their love is a type of that fundamental love which attracts opposites into the closest bonds. No matter, therefore, how wide the chasm by which circumstances separated their lives, they were sure to try for each other. Reciprocal love is not the most common thing in the world; for those we love and those who love us are sometimes two very different things. For this reason, if you leave but this story of the love of each for each to this play, you might take everything else away, and it would still retain and deserve its undying interest. Nothing in art is perennially influential which does not appeal to the primal, the elemental, for human sympathy.

Othello knows that he has found his fate in Desdemona; yet he leaves her to

challenge his heart, make the first advance. And because there was something precipitate in her nature, and for the further reason that she recognized in the Moor her conqueror, she yielded without even a summons to submit. In marrying, she married the man she loved, but in doing so she violated the inviolable right of paternal authority, from whose will a daughter can not sever herself without calling forth the demon of tragedy. In choosing, she chose not according to the blind charm of the senses,—she saw Othello's visage in his mind; and her choice is thoroughly justified, for the earnestness of love should be marriage. She sacrificed, however, a daughter's obedience to her love, and, for this reason, storm threatens their union from its very commencement, which by-and-by will relieve itself in lightning. Such conflict as this of right against right, of daughter against

father, makes tragedy which tears the heart-strings. The very first suspicion that finds lodgment, then takes root, in Othello's soul, is, that as a daughter, she deceived her father. It was Iago's dwelling on this fact that convinced Othello that his love was trampled upon; when there awoke forces in his nature he least of any one suspected; whose momentum he least of any one understood. He was no such psychologist or philosopher as that one who said: "There is no crime in the universe that I might not have committed had certain influences played upon me."

"My heart's subdued
Even to the very quality of my lord,—"

sums up Desdemona's love. She is timidity itself where her father is concerned,—brave only in loving Othello. "Every mán," said Coleridge, "wants a Desdemona for a wife,—one who can

feel for you and feel with you." From the love and protection of a sheltered home we see her go to the unaccustomed life of camp and fortified town. She spoke truly when she said, "I did love the Moor to live with him." The collision of daughter and father, her leaving Venice and accompanying her husband to a foreign shore, leaves her no world but her love. As it is wrought out against such a dark background, here we are to watch the working out of Othello's and Desdemona's destiny, as they represent blind Love in contest with wide-eyed Hate embodied in Iago.

After the initial incident of the drunkenness, Desdemona is disturbed and alarmed, which gives us in Othello's exclamation a beautiful illustration of nature being fine in love. It takes the strong to be thus gentle; never was affection more shielding than the Moor's. From this night we behold him between

his unquenchable love and the nightmare of Iago's hellish suggestions to arouse his jealousy. Rochefoucauld said that no one escapes causing jealousy who is worthy of exciting it.

There is no better way to take up the two most difficult questions in Othello than by investigating what others have said on these subjects. We quote without apology, holding with Goethe that the most interesting articles are critiques. Victor Hugo, while he was a very great man, yet he was French, and partly for that reason we believe he missed the interpretation rather than found it. It is so difficult for those of one country to understand the writers of another that when the task has difficulties of its own, to them it becomes doubly so. If their conclusions are different from the wisest of insight of the author's own country, it always leaves open a parenthesis. Or, if they depict a character

acting out of accord with what we have been made to believe at the outset the actions of such a character would be, by the creator of that character, we deny the title of excellence to the critic in that particular instance. There are three things worth contesting for,— beauty, virtue, and truth. We give the quotation, though we believe he failed to get inside the English mind:

—“What is Othello? He is night. An immense fatal figure, Night, is amorous of Day. Darkness loves the dawn. The African adores the white woman. Othello has, for his light and his frenzy, Desdemona. And then how easy to him is jealousy! He is great, he is dignified, he is majestic, he soars above all heads; he has an escort, bravery, battle, the braying of trumpets, the banners of war, renown, glory; he is radiant with twenty victories; he is studded with stars, this Othello: but he is black. And thus how

soon, when jealous, the hero becomes the monster, the black becomes the negro! How speedily has night beckoned to death!

“By the side of Othello, who is night, there is Iago, who is evil,—evil, the other form of darkness. Night is but the night of the world; evil is the night of the soul. How deeply black are perfidy and falsehood! It is all one, whether what courses through the veins be ink or treason. Whoever has jostled against imposture and perjury, knows it; one must blindly grope one’s way with knavery. Pour hypocrisy upon the break of day, and you put out the sun; and this, thanks to false religions, is what happens to God.

“Iago near Othello is the precipice near the landslip. ‘This way!’ he says in a low voice. The snare advises blindness. The lover of darkness guides the black. Deceit takes it upon itself to

give what light may be required by night. Falsehood serves as a blind man's dog to jealousy. Othello the negro and Iago the traitor pitted against whiteness and candor: what more formidable? These ferocities of darkness act in unison. These two incarnations of the eclipse conspire, the one roaring, the other sneering, for the tragic suffocation of light. Sound this profound thing, Othello is night, and being night, and wishing to kill, what does he take to slay with? Poison? the club? the ax? the knife? No; the pillow. To kill is to lull to sleep. Shakespeare himself, perhaps, did not take this into account. The creator sometimes, almost unknown to himself, yields to the type, so truly is that type a power. And it is thus that Desdemona, spouse of the man Night, dies, stifled by the pillow upon which the first kiss was given, and which receives the last sigh."

Ulrici, being a German, had similar difficulties to contend with that Victor Hugo did. He thought that Othello was black, but morally a great man; but he believed, to attain that greatness, he had struggled and overcome his natural temperament. Schlegel, too, saw in the Moor, not the white man, but one with Cain's brand on his forehead, who unavoidably falls into the jealousy and thirst for revenge peculiar to his race. The true excellence of the German mind is its subtlety of intellect. In their own language they dig, we know, very deep; but we likewise know that difficulties are manifold when one tries to gain the point of view of those of another country. No great English writer believes in a black Othello. We can but feel a throb of gratitude that Shakespeare's language is our mother-tongue, for there is a more certain and sure sympathy of understanding between those of

a common descent and common language.

Roderigo uses the term "thick-lips" contemptuously; the rivalry is sufficient to account for his confusion of negro and Moor, aside from his ignorance. He was head-over-ears in love with the most beautiful woman in Venice, while she did not seem to know of his existence. Coleridge says that Roderigo was perfectly fitted for the purposes of Iago, as want of character and strength of purpose constituted his character. Roderigo had no anchor anywhere; and, if he had, there was nothing to anchor. "I'm changed," he says; "I'll go sell all my land." Iago's dealings with him were full of humor. He opened quite a rich mine, wherein he digged as occasion called. While spending, and therefore making safe his interest in the rich finds, he received by turns the praise and reproof of his dupe. No doubt he felt

that as the most irksome business when it came time to receive the applause of a fool. Nevertheless, he went on and perfected himself in this branch of art, for like Fortunatus' purse, which is always to furnish him without ever putting anything in it, evermore must Roderigo's purse open for the thousand-fold necessities of his ambition; means must still meet ends. Ever the voracious demand, "Put money in thy purse," that, like a horn of plenty, it may pour. Dryden declares, "Roderigo is—" but it may be sin to even repeat what he says. Lamb once remarked that he would give a trifle to know, historically and authentically, who was the greatest fool that ever lived. No man ever excelled all the world, it is said, in more than one faculty. In written lives Roderigo deserves to hold the proud distinction of greatest fool.

Those inhabiting the coast-land of

Africa are known as Moors and Arabs. The Moors attained a higher degree of civilization than their brethren. They are finely molded, athletic, and lithe. The name means dark, and they are swarthy complexioned, but not negroes by any means. Even the Nubians, south of the Moors, are not negroes, but are supposed to be the descendants of the ancient Egyptians; south of them the true negro zone appears. The result to the play from the conception of a black Othello is that of disenchantment. Shakespeare would scarcely have offended in this way. Besides, art deals with the rational. Had Othello been black, it would have denoted something wanting in Desdemona to have so chosen.

Coleridge says of Roderigo's term thick-lips, "Here comes one, if not the only, seeming justification of our black-amoor or negro Othello. . . . Can we

imagine Shakespeare so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous negro plead royal birth, at a time, too, when they were not known except as slaves? . . . It is a common error to mistake the epithets applied by *dramatis personæ* to each other as truly descriptive; it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue a want of balance in Desdemona which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated."

Othello says:

"I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege."

From this we believe the dramatist intended us to understand that he was a Moor of kingly birth, a descendant of the Spanish Moors. Perhaps, as a nudge to our comprehension, he puts in his possession a sword of Spain of the

ice-brook's temper. Shakespeare learned the spirit of the character from the Spanish poetry which was prevalent in England in his time. He chose the Moor, in all probability, because romance hovered over them, making them fit subject for dramatic material.

Another difficult question in this play, on which opinions differ as far as the East from the West, is: Whether Othello was jealous in the common understanding of that word, or whether he was not. We quote from Barrett Wendell: "Othello is the supreme tragedy of jealousy. Naturally, then, we think of this broadly handled tragedy of character, dealing so consummately with an absorbing human passion, as a thing apart in the work of Shakespeare. Mere jealousy, however, without subtle analysis, would have been enough finally to remind us that the concentrated passion and power of Othello only intensify the

old motive of the mystery inherent in the fact that men are men, and women are women. Jealousy, after all, is but a new phase of this, and a more absorbing."

While we do not see in the foregoing that the left hand of the premises has much to do with the right hand of the conclusion, yet, with the fundamental fact as given by Black and Howells, involved in it, we have no quarrel. Black remarks that, disguise it as you will, the underlying interest of every transcript of human life is primarily the interest of sex; and Howells says that the reason Robinson Crusoe can not be read in maturity, is that it has no heroine.

Coleridge, whose sympathetic understanding of the poet we know not where to find equaled, holds a different opinion from Barrett Wendell. Carlyle says that it is admitted on all hands that Coleridge is a man of genius; that is, a man hav-

ing more intellectual insight than other men. " 'Winter's Tale,' " Coleridge says, "is a genuine jealousy of disposition, and it should be immediately followed by the perusal of 'Othello,' which is a direct contrast to it in every particular. For jealousy is a vice of the mind, a culpable tendency of temper, having certain well-known and well-defined effects and concomitants, all of which are visible in Leontes, and, I boldly say, not one of which marks its presence in Othello. . . . Shakespeare portrayed Othello the very opposite to a jealous man: he was noble, generous, open-hearted, unsuspecting, and unsuspecting. . . . Jealousy does not strike me as the point in his passion. . . . It was the struggle not to love her. It was a moral indignation and regret that virtue should so fall. But yet 'the pity of it, Iago!—O Iago! the pity of it, Iago!' "

Othello had no faculty for complica-

tions; he lost himself; being wrought on, he was perplexed in the extreme. So the handkerchief, which was dear to them both as the first token of their love, becomes as soon as it reaches Iago's hands a powerful instrument of passion and of evil. The accident of the handkerchief may be said to introduce the catastrophe. Some paltry accidents show mighty purport. Chance in this instance seems to have executed precisely and accurately what Fate had determined. Emilia's little lie about the handkerchief prints on our brains our every-day little motives and acts, and their sometime terrible results, in lines of tell-tale fire. So this little fault that it seemed could have but slight influence, and that immediately, had long enough arms to reach forward to the catastrophe of many lives. Emilia's lie teaches, as life itself, by indirection.

Clark remarks about Othello's differ-

ent stories to Desdemona about this same little square: "Even this slight deviation from the truth on his part works its own retribution. Had he not over-excited the lady's fears by this description of the handkerchief and startled her by his peremptoriness in demanding it, she might not have been tempted to prevaricate and tell a falsehood in reply to his divergence from absolute fact. Thus subtly does the greatest of dramatic moralists draw his ethical lessons." Barrett Wendell says that, for all her tenderness and purity, Desdemona's word is not always to be trusted. And this is the usual view which is taken of this question of veracity in this play. Desdemona indeed! Who is it that does not lie about this little handkerchief?

In the middle act, third scene, comes the central turning point, where the climax of this main action goes toward a change. Othello, following the re-

treating form of Desdemona with his eyes, exclaims :

“Excellent wretch ! perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee !”

Dr. Johnson says that “wretch” expresses the utmost degree of amiableness, joined with an idea which all tenderness includes of softness and want of protection. We can neither say that here Othello’s love reaches its height, nor that the ebb begins ; but it is here caught in a seething vortex and driven hither and thither. [Immediately following this, Iago distracts Othello’s mind with the thought, the fear of his wife’s infidelity.] And fear must have its satisfaction as well as fancy. Genius is the highest form of sympathy. We must try to place ourselves in Othello’s situation and under his circumstances. Then we shall understand, then we shall comprehend, that he could not have

acted otherwise with the light he had,— a husband, he is stung to madness by a wife's unfaithfulness. Confronted with this sin, a background of wrath lies in every man. Therefore, his passion developed in a most serious and profound cause, and, like the river hurrying to the ocean, it flows with an ever-increasing tide. We watch it from the very slightest undulation of feeling, as seen on the surface, as it rises from the malicious suggestions of Iago, which are deliberate, guarded, insidious, dark, till it becomes

“Like to the Pontic sea

Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont.”

With belief in Desdemona's infidelity, faith and love die out of his life, which is the only absolute despair. All happiness and unhappiness flow from these two fundamental things—belief and

love. To these all knowledge is but tributary. To know is not life's consummation, but to believe in something, to love some one. The despair of shaken faith and love threatens to drown his soul; he strives to put honor in their place. Only those who have tried, know how vain a thing it is to strive to bridge this loveless, faithless chasm.

A man who would not have had sufficient proof of a wife's unfaithfulness with what Iago furnished Othello withal, must have possessed Arcadian simplicity. Yet to have reasons for being jealous is not to be jealous. For instance, Iago is jealous. His suspicions about Othello are purely imaginary; his keen sense tells him that they are, yet he clings to something, where nothing is to be found, and finds it. This is to be jealous. The passion kindled by actual infidelity is as justifiable as that

excited by any other moral offense committed by the one you love.

Desdemona's belief in Othello never wavered. For some reason she could not understand he had become blinded into suspecting and repudiating her; but she still had faith in him—could love him more than ever under the cloud that had somehow fallen over his noble spirit. Physical death is not tragedy; but to lose faith and love out of the soul, that is tragedy. Desdemona is sharply contrasted with Emilia, who is morally weak, and for that reason considers all women so. There is such difference between their thoughts and sentiments as shows almost as great contrast between them as between their husbands, and by signs as plain and as little to be mistaken. Nothing places Desdemona in a more interesting light than the conversation between her and Emilia on the conduct of women to their husbands. A

little later her reply to Emilia's exclamation that she wished she had never seen Othello, wins our heart by the charm of its humility:

"So would not I: my love doth so approve
him

That even his stubbornness, his checks, his
frowns,

Have grace and favor in them."

It seems destiny had marked him out to injure what he loved beyond all else. Under his terrible persecution she no longer loves, she adores. Coleridge says that Shakespeare has drawn the character of Desdemona with those qualities of which a man examining his own heart might say: "Let that woman be my companion through life; let her be the object of my suit, and the reward of my success." Whether or not we agree with his conclusion, a study of Shakespeare's women reveals the fact that he evidently

thought that woman is "strong to sanctify even when she can not save," in a way which is not possible to man.

Desdemona, however, is suspected; [Love has broken its faith with her.] As she prepares for bed on the last fatal night, she confers with sorrow. And as she confers with sorrow, Death haunts her, and she sings the song of the willow. It was her last lullaby; she would sleep no more. Before the night is far spent, Othello enters. He stands silent regarding the face of his unconscious wife. Life is not divided for him; that it has been a simple one reveals itself by his grief. All the passion of his soul sets like a mighty tide toward this dreamer, the only love his life has known. He hears no sound but the throb of his own passion; sees no image save that one face. Two courses of action struggle together in his nature for mastery,—should he, or should he not; let her live? It was inevitable with the

most painful duty on the one hand, love within grasp on the other, that any man should rebel against a decree of renunciation. While hesitating, he broods on the mystery of life and death, and thinks that if he lets her live it will only be to betray more men; but then he asks, what if he should repent him after putting out the light of her life? And as he broods, her face becomes his distraction; her matchless loveliness appeals to him with all the added power of its unprotectedness; and the protecting spirit in man toward child and woman is that which nears him most to his Maker. Moving, indeed, is the scene which follows, where we witness him in almost unimaginable passion of anguish. Almost unimaginable—altogether unimaginable—but to one who has suffered a loss which exhausted life, which left nothing but a sea of sorrow to break along life's shore.

If every closed-door conversation has an interest for us, as has been said, then this of Othello's, based on the utmost passion of which the human heart is capable, in its efforts to resign love, might tempt honesty itself to eavesdropping if Shakespeare would not let us hear. And this is that passion of love which is mimicked when one knows not what it means. In the full consciousness of his coming loss, it seems as if Othello's high sense of justice must melt like virtue before a hot temptation; but no—he must kill her first, then he shall be freed from duty, and may love her afterwards. We can not but believe Shakespeare's hot tears fell with Othello's as he stood over the sleeping Desdemona. He had to struggle against her helplessness, because it was a helplessness that he, of all the world, should protect, and that was in his nature; he had to struggle against her

helplessness because a sterner duty demanded her death at his hand, and that was not in his nature. No such passion as this of Othello's was ever self-created or self-sustained, but must depend upon the actual force of its external cause. Hamlet's love for Ophelia represents man's dream of love; Othello's love for Desdemona is the deliverance of man from the dream to the reality.

Life and death, rapture and anguish, mingle together in his disjointed soliloquy in a way that enhances all former impressions of her sweetness a hundred-fold. Here only does he unpack his heart of words, portraying unconsciously the mortal grace that dwells in flesh. He quaffs again and again Love's rapturous draught, but dissolves not the pearl of his virtue in the cup. For in the face of the soul-crushing belief in her infidelity, and the duty which devolved in such instances upon husbands

in that day, he puts it from him, and hurries him to the sacrifice.

In doing so, Othello resisted the sorest temptations from within and without wherewithal a man could be tempted. Though his spirit broke in the conflict, he was conqueror of himself. As seen by the eye of the morally judging man, the kingliest of his kind is he,—a man of incorruptible virtue, that highest of human endowments. How infinitely far removed from Othello is that sometime acceptation of a virtuous man as one who simply puts a high price upon himself! Virtue was the secret of Socrates, that which has endeared him to mankind. Othello's shines as if clad with sunbeams.

Desdemona wakes, looks up confusedly, beseechingly, into Othello's dark, tear-stained, hopeless face. She is overcome with fear when he bids her pray, saying he would not kill her un-

prepared spirit. Her protestations of innocence are interrupted:

“ Sweet soul, take heed,
Take heed of perjury ; thou art on thy death-
bed.”

From the very first scene a shadow of coming ill, a low voice of doom, falls. It is now plain that the catastrophe prophesied from the beginning draws nigh. Fronting the extremity that Othello's fatal deception made him believe faced him, we can not but notice he is merciful as may be to Desdemona, nor thinks of himself,—a tortured man with a broken heart. His mercifulness is like a ray of light falling athwart this dark picture. Desdemona pleads for respite; death is terrible to her,—“Kill me to-morrow; let me live to-night.” He will not add to the punishment justice compels him to inflict; mercy demands no more delay. Othello knew

he had reached his limitation, that a man can not forever stand resolute and face such pleading. There is no common thirst for revenge in the external manner in which he executes the murder,—how could such a deed be done in a more touching way? It is when we are brought to such a point of tenderness that all her love does but add another pang to her death, that we must witness the expiring conflict between Othello's love and his false idea of duty. Steeling his mind against sensibility, raising his will to such power as to drive back the pangs of life itself, he then and there became the executioner of his own mistaken sense of justice.

This murder stands in no mortal key in its power of inflicting torture, and of suffering it. Dr. Johnson exclaims: "I am glad I have ended my revisal of this dreadful scene; it is not to be endured!" Whoever studies long this tragedy is in

danger of being followed by it through time as by "Lear's fury, Hamlet's melancholy, and Macbeth's remorse." Othello may be blameworthy; but only he can tell us how blameworthy; who can tell us who would have been safe from Iago?

This story has run on with an ever-widening sweep until, slowly, out of what was individual and personal, a vaster drama has unfolded itself. For the story of the love of Othello and Desdemona is prophetic, and finds its fulfillment not in their lives. There is in everything which approaches greatness an exhilaration for the human spirit. All life bears witness to the search for such love and faith as is here prophesied. It is pathetically universal, and its fulfillment to its promise pathetically inadequate. For this reason fiction has become the avenue of escape from personal experience, from realities which

do not correspond with man's high conceptions. In this fact lies its wonderful power; man looks for the appearance of a great love, a great faith in the world of thought and imagination, before its embodiment in life. This it is for which men and women search believingly throughout the realm of fiction. Each, believing there is the promise in every broken, mutilated love, in faith that is not perfect, would be the first to make the discovery. They feel that the talisman, the example of a great love stands in intimate, vital relation to the highest life. But is there hope in such a quest for the terrible soul? There can be no doubt of the truth of the conclusion that there is power in human love to work as inspiration and as greatness, but it is ministrant to a higher still; it has this end to serve, love is the interpreter of God to man. To know Him is the soul's *summum bonum*; to be like Him life's ultimate end.

Emilia arrives after the murder just in time to be not in time. While she did not hesitate to tell a falsehood about the handkerchief as the easiest way out of the difficulty; she is roused by Othello's blindness and Iago's atrocious villainy to risk and lose life itself in defending the innocence of Desdemona.

“O thou dull Moor! That handkerchief
thou speakest of,
I found by fortune, and did give my husband;
For often with a solemn earnestness
He begg'd of me to steal it—

* * * * *

She gave it Cassio! no, alas, I found it,”—

she exclaims bitterly; at the same time revealing the whole history of Othello's ruin. If he never suffered before, he suffered in the hour of resolution. “Why does he know of her fidelity only when she is lost to him forever?” he asks with that ache of the heart which is worse than any physical pain. To

read this story is to look on at a duel when you sympathize with both sides. Coleridge asks: "Which do we pity most?" Othello calls for a thousand pities; and Desdemona, tears.

In momentary peril of life Othello recounts incidents from his past; for like to a drowning man the panorama of his life flashed before him. Human anguish at the lowest deep of desolation is wont, like the heart of a whirlpool, to be strangely calm. He compares himself to a base Indian who in ignorance threw a pearl away. Too late he sees his calamitous mistake. His heart has no place of strength or refuge left,—one thought, and that of misery. He goes as it were to meet Death, offers it a welcome. There is in Othello all the majesty of the humble, the pitiful, the mournful. Wordsworth compares the pathos in "Othello" to the last scene in the life of Socrates. The faculty of

love and suffering is the measure of high souls, as an incapacity to love and suffer means an undeveloped being. The greatness of these faculties in Othello marks his rank in nature. There was a chalice of sorrow pressed to his lips which selfishness can never drink. His motive in slaying Desdemona was purely that he thought her death was demanded at his hand, which made her murder a very sacrament. This note he gives back in the hour of reaction:

“ O, I were damned beneath all depth of hell,
But that I did proceed upon just grounds
To this extremity.”

As the end approaches, Othello rises in tragic greatness. Every man is entitled, to a considerable extent, to be measured and judged by his motives. We judge our friends so. If anything could add to our compassion for Othello's fate it would be that he so

little deserved it. This we shall the more readily concede, if we will but read over again all whereby he made himself known unto us. He dies—clinging to that transient, extinguished life,—and his death is hallowed by the sublimity of pity. His way was under the tutelage of sorrow; the wine of his life was had by the crushing of life's grapes. His last words commingle the mother's hush with the expiring sob of the storm, and somehow imply the thought of one who believes that death is an end to the bewilderments of life.

Swinburne says: "The sacrificial death of Desdemona is terrible as tragedy may ever be, but beautiful,—from the first kiss to the last stab—'so, so'—when the sacrificing man of retribution immolates the victim whose blood he had forborne to shed for pity of her beauty, till impelled to forget his first impulse, and shed it for pity of her suffering. His

words can bear no other meaning. Otherwise how explain Desdemona regaining her breath, after being stifled to death, and uttering the most heavenly falsehood that ever put truth to shame? To recover breath enough to speak, to think of the danger to Othello, and attempt his defense, she must have recovered breath enough to live if undispatched by some sharper instrument."

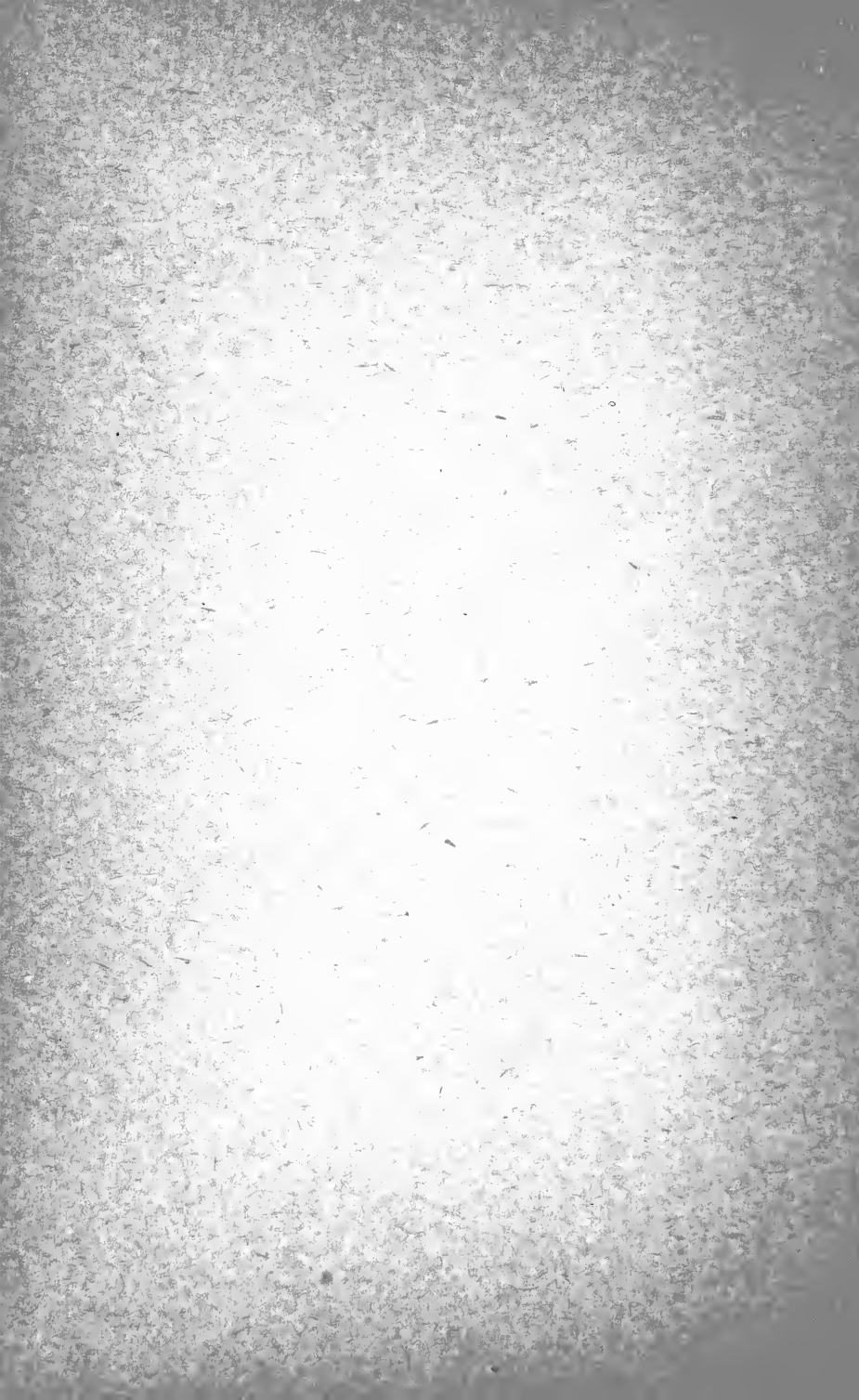
Shakespeare, it is said, swings no censor, and he may never have dreamed of the lesson of pardon conveyed in Desdemona's last words; but the ethical beauty and redeeming power of the spirit of forgiveness is the excuse, the apology for, the explanation, the golden light, which is here flung over her character.

Desdemona lost in that moment of unconsciousness all personal terror; the chord of self died; and she wakes, it seems, to prove that love alone survives the ultimate trial—death. "Would I

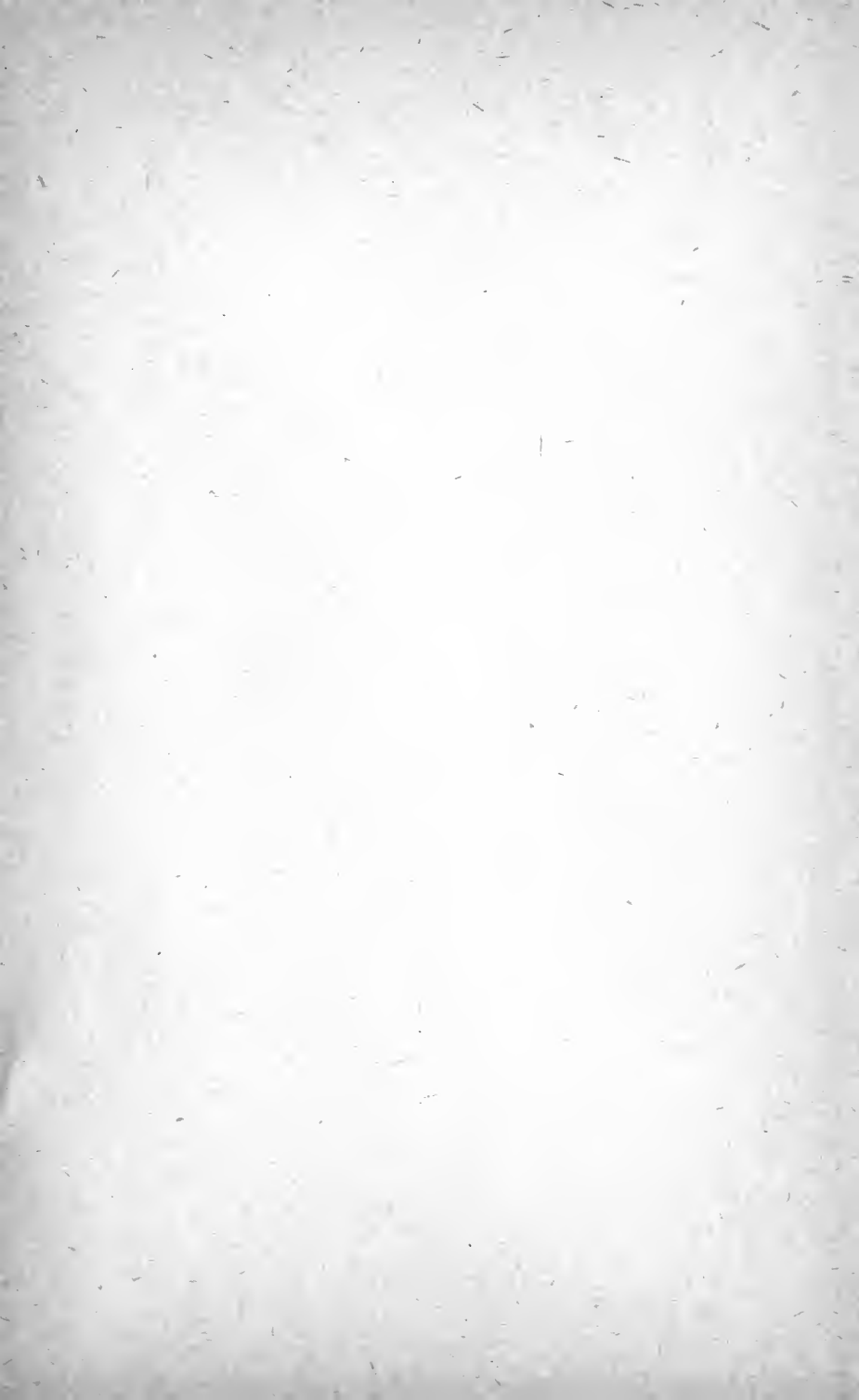
suffer for him that I love?" asks Browning. She answers with the wondrous strength of a woman's affection: Yes, suffer, and die, and come to life again to be Love's solicitor. And, yielding for the last time to that greatest temptation of the timid, loving nature, "she covered up the grave of her life with the leaves of true love, saying, 'I did it myself.' "

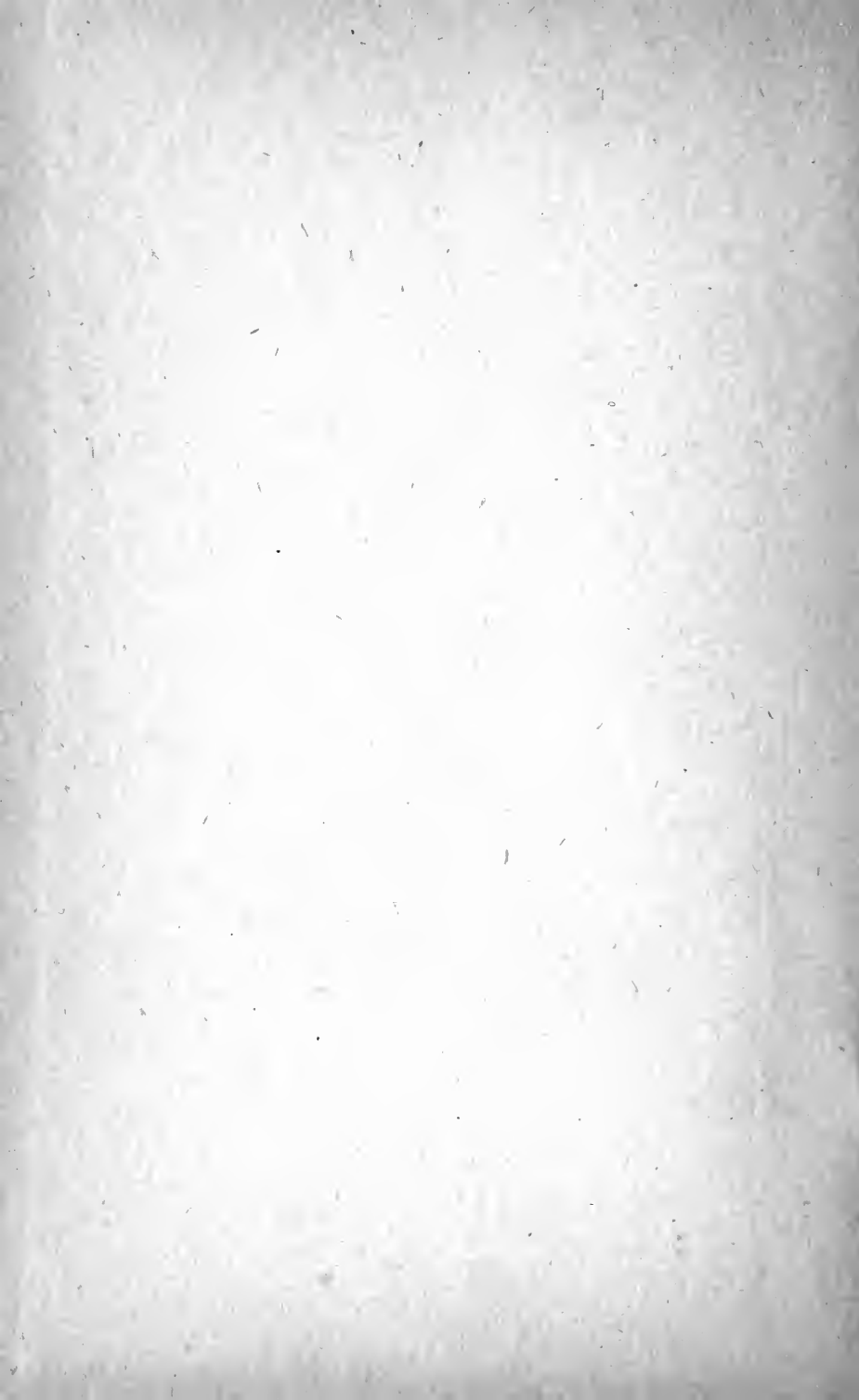
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